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Fact Sheet

Over 9 Million Adults Ages 50 and Older Faced Food Insecurity in 2021

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Every year, millions of Americans ages 50 and older experience food insecurity, meaning they have limited or uncertain access to adequate, nutritious food.[1] Food insecurity is associated with poorer health outcomes among older adults; in fact, adults ages 60 and older who are food insecure are more likely than those who have food security to have health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, congestive heart failure, asthma, and depression.[2]

This *Fact Sheet* describes trends in food insecurity and selected characteristics of food-insecure adults ages 50 and older. State-level data are included in the appendix.

In 2021, nearly 9.4 million (or about 8 percent of) Americans ages 50 and older were food insecure, meaning they had limited or uncertain access to adequate, nutritious food. The data reveal significant differences by state, age, race and ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics.

Key Takeaways

Food insecurity is most prevalent among older adults who:

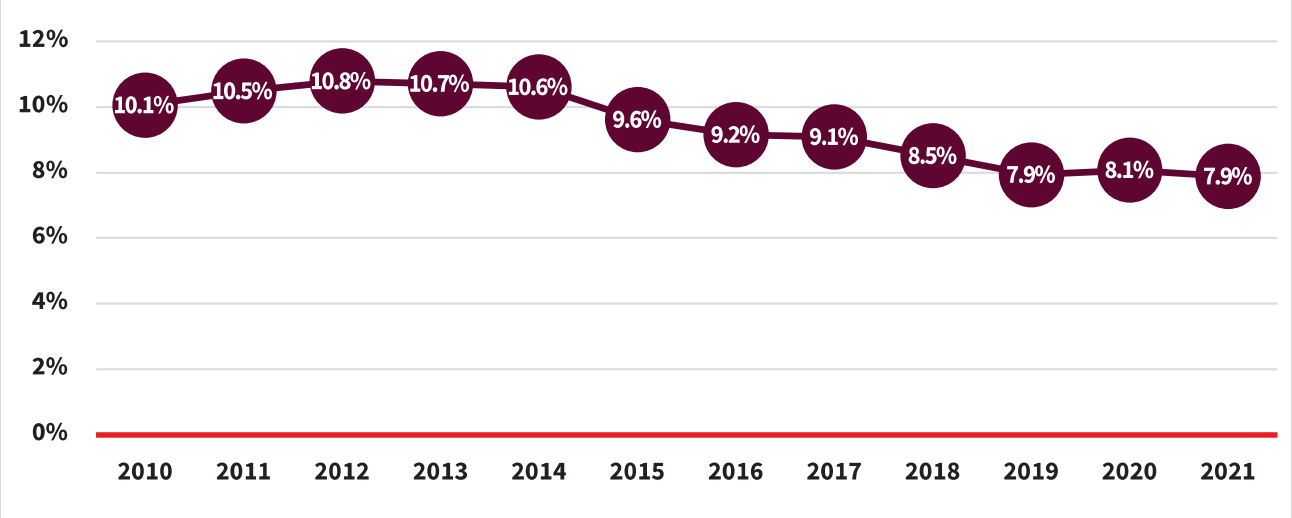
- *Are younger (i.e., ages 50–59)*
- *Are Black, American Indian/ Alaska Native, or Hispanic*
- *Are lower income*
- *Have lower levels of education*

Trends in Older-Adult Food Insecurity

Over the past decade, food insecurity among adults ages 50 and older has remained between 8 and 11 percent of the population (figure 1). After peaking at 10.8 percent in 2012, food insecurity prevalence among adults ages 50 and older dropped to a low of 7.9 percent in 2019. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic leading to widespread job loss in 2020, the share of older Americans experiencing food insecurity did not change significantly from 2019 to 2020. Between 2019 and 2020, food insecurity among this age group increased slightly, from 7.9 to 8.1 percent—and then dropped to 7.9 percent in 2021. Short-term pandemic-related policy likely played an important role in food insecurity rates staying fairly stable over this time. However, not all groups fared equally, as discussed later in this Fact Sheet. In 2021, 7.9 percent of the population ages 50 and older equated to nearly 9.4 million people (see appendix).

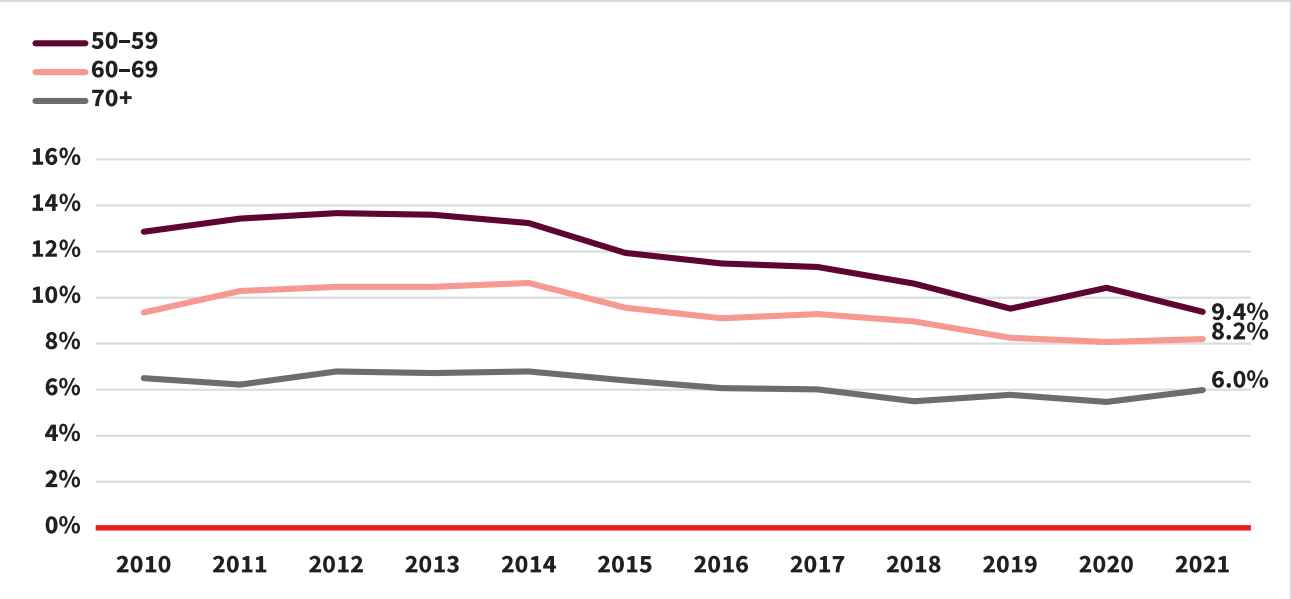
Among adults ages 50 and older, food insecurity prevalence decreases with age. Adults ages 50 to 59 experience food insecurity at about 1.5 times the rate of those ages 70 and older (figure 2). After rising slightly in 2020, food insecurity prevalence among adults ages 50 to 59 dropped by a percentage point in 2021.

FIGURE 1
Food Insecurity Among Adults Ages 50+, 2010–21



Source: *AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FFS).*

FIGURE 2
Food Insecurity Prevalence by Older Age Group, 2010–21



Source: *AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FFS).*

State-Level Differences in Food Insecurity among Older Adults

Food insecurity among adults ages 50 and older varies widely by state, but it tends to be more prevalent in Southern states (figure 3). In 2020, Iowa had the lowest prevalence of food insecurity among this age group (3.5 percent); Arkansas had the highest (14.3 percent). State-level prevalence data for older adult subgroups are available in the appendix.

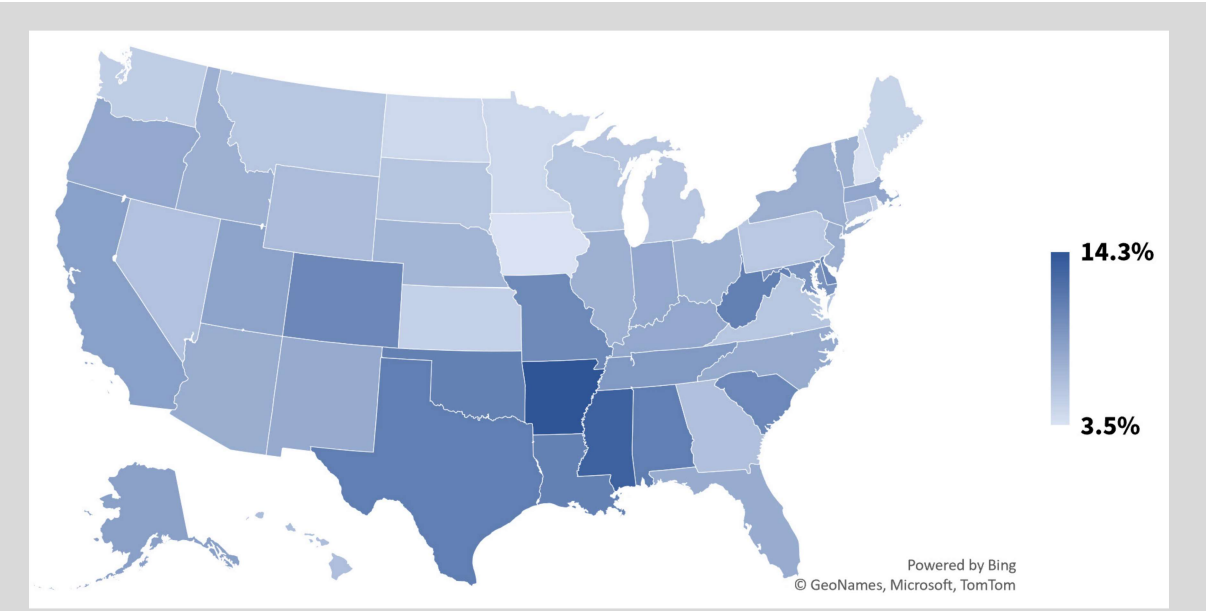
Demographic Characteristics Linked to Older-Adult Food Insecurity

In 2021, certain subgroups of adults ages 50 and older experienced considerably higher levels of food insecurity than others.

- **Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic**: Food insecurity was most prevalent among those who were Black (16.8 percent; figure 4), followed by American Indian/Alaska Native (16.3 percent) and Hispanic (14.6 percent). After widening in 2020, racial and ethnic disparities in food insecurity narrowed slightly in 2021; food insecurity dropped slightly among Black and American Indian/Alaska Native adults ages 50 and older. However, racial and ethnic disparities in food insecurity have persisted and narrowed only slightly over the past decade (figure 5).
- **Low educational attainment**: Food insecurity prevalence was highest among adults ages 50 and older without a high school diploma (19.2 percent) and decreased with increasing levels of educational attainment (figure 4). Fewer than 4 percent of adults ages 50 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher were food insecure.
- **Low income**: Unsurprisingly, food insecurity prevalence decreases with increasing income. 18 percent of adults ages 50 and older with household incomes below $30,000 were food insecure, compared with less than 2 percent of those earning $100,000 or more (figure 4).
- **Female**: Females ages 50 and older were more likely than their male counterparts to be food insecure (8.5 percent versus 7.2 percent; figure 4).

FIGURE 3

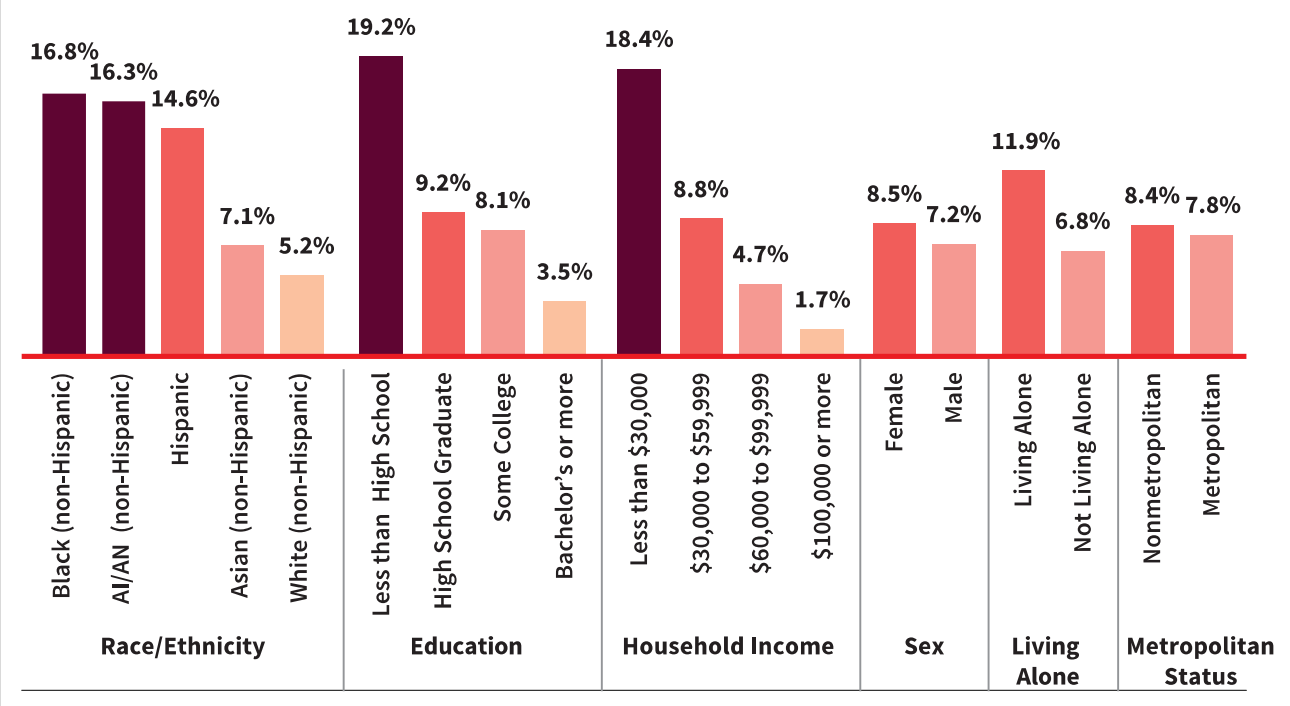
State-Level Food Insecurity Prevalence among Adults Ages 50+, 2021



Source: *AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FFS).*

FIGURE 4

Food Insecurity Prevalence among Adults 50+ by Demographic Characteristics, 2021

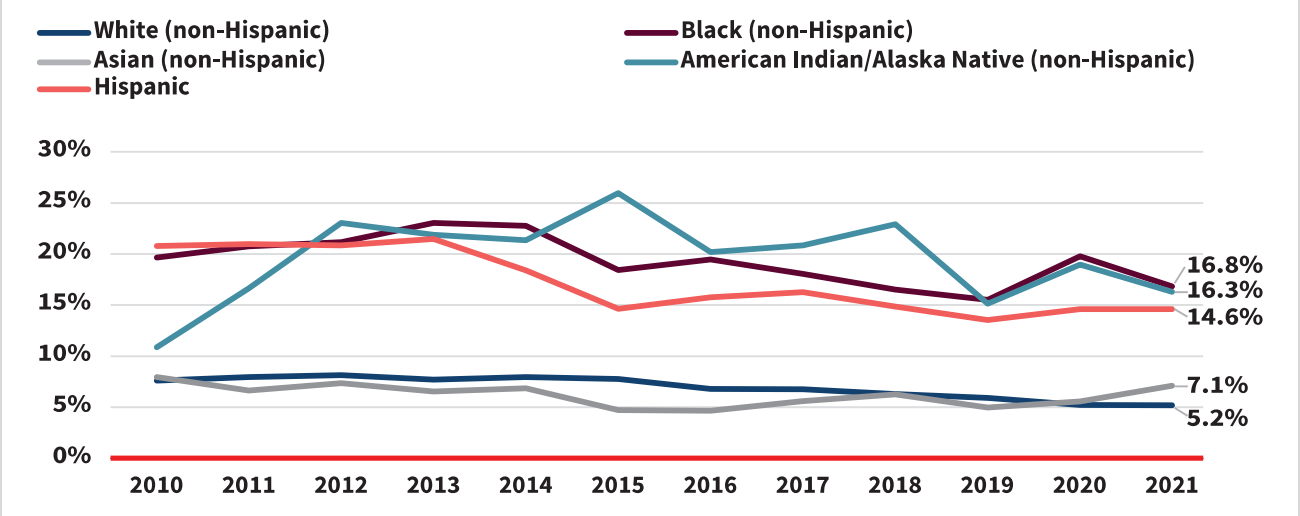


Note on data limitations: *AI/AN refers to American Indian/Alaska Native. Other racial/ethnic categories not included due to insufficient sample size. Currently, CPS measures sex as a binary variable and does not ask about gender identity, which excludes nonbinary people.*

Source: *AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of 2021 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS).*

FIGURE 5

Trends in Food Insecurity Prevalence among Americans Ages 50+, by Race/Ethnicity



Note: *Other racial/ethnic categories not included due to insufficient sample size.*

Source: *AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS).*

- **Living alone**: Adults ages 50 and older who lived alone were more likely to be food insecure than those living with others (11.9 percent versus 6.8 percent; figure 4).
- **Rural**: Adults ages 50 and older living in nonmetropolitan (rural) areas were slightly more likely to be food insecure than those living in metropolitan (urban) areas (8.4 percent versus 7.8 percent; figure 4).[3]

Conclusion

Over 9 million Americans ages 50 and older (about 1 in 12) were food insecure in 2021, a number that has not changed substantially in recent years. Congressional actions during the COVID-19 pandemic such as boosts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)[4] may have helped millions of older adults put food on the table in a time of need and prevented overall increases in food insecurity. However, these findings obscure other issues—specifically, the continuation of considerably higher food insecurity among various demographic groups that is likely rooted in longstanding inequities across domains, such as employment, housing, and health care.

Appendix

Food Insecurity Prevalence by Age Group, 2021

State	50–59		60–69		70+		50+	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Alabama	15.7%	108,044	7.5%	44,157	9.4%	53,126	11.1%	205,327
Alaska	N/A	N/A	11.6%	11,736	N/A	N/A	8.5%	19,058
Arizona	5.9%	60,881	14.2%	118,198	3.2%	28,585	7.5%	207,664
Arkansas	21.6%	90,370	17.3%	55,479	4.4%	17,392	14.3%	163,241
California	10.0%	463,833	8.0%	355,900	7.4%	292,975	8.5%	1,112,709
Colorado	N/A	N/A	11.3%	97,063	N/A	N/A	10.4%	219,166
Connecticut	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6.3%	86,080
Delaware	N/A	N/A	8.0%	13,158	8.1%	11,735	10.4%	43,111
District of Columbia	8.2%	4,980	14.5%	9,656	3.1%	2,151	8.5%	16,786
Florida	5.8%	168,754	9.1%	254,598	7.9%	279,562	7.6%	702,913
Georgia	4.3%	70,293	7.3%	70,102	7.4%	84,981	6.0%	225,376
Hawaii	9.5%	15,806	3.9%	6,671	5.4%	10,383	6.2%	32,860
Idaho	8.1%	18,385	10.2%	21,937	3.6%	8,029	7.3%	48,351
Illinois	7.1%	112,434	7.1%	97,952	7.5%	112,624	7.3%	323,009
Indiana	9.6%	81,179	7.9%	52,807	6.2%	52,120	7.9%	186,106
Iowa	6.3%	27,013	N/A	N/A	3.2%	11,605	3.5%	38,619
Kansas	4.9%	15,021	4.7%	15,595	4.8%	17,002	4.8%	47,618
Kentucky	N/A	N/A	5.6%	30,286	4.7%	28,512	7.9%	129,314
Louisiana	6.6%	35,071	11.8%	59,761	13.9%	83,777	10.9%	178,609
Maine	N/A	N/A	3.9%	8,875	2.7%	5,955	4.6%	27,699
Maryland	11.9%	94,438	9.4%	74,898	6.6%	41,676	9.5%	211,013
Massachusetts	10.1%	85,841	11.8%	103,957	2.2%	19,307	8.0%	209,105
Michigan	5.8%	66,617	9.1%	128,422	1.2%	14,048	5.6%	209,087
Minnesota	5.5%	41,299	4.6%	31,830	2.3%	13,646	4.3%	86,776
Mississippi	13.6%	53,341	14.4%	53,604	11.9%	35,752	13.4%	142,697

State	50–59		60–69		70+		50+	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Missouri	11.6%	98,272	11.6%	88,495	7.5%	53,251	10.3%	240,018
Montana	6.8%	6,678	6.2%	9,451	4.4%	7,199	5.6%	23,328
Nebraska	N/A	N/A	4.9%	12,068	N/A	N/A	6.9%	46,989
Nevada	11.7%	43,940	4.6%	19,233	2.0%	7,629	6.0%	70,802
New Hampshire	5.4%	9,050	3.7%	8,005	1.9%	4,033	3.5%	21,089
New Jersey	9.2%	112,912	5.4%	65,596	7.7%	69,995	7.4%	248,503
New Mexico	9.9%	25,362	6.6%	16,474	6.5%	14,490	7.7%	56,325
New York	9.9%	237,744	5.2%	123,067	7.1%	157,143	7.4%	517,953
North Carolina	9.0%	124,549	8.6%	109,560	5.6%	80,756	7.7%	314,866
North Dakota	5.5%	3,955	4.4%	4,504	3.1%	2,498	4.3%	10,957
Ohio	10.8%	140,783	6.8%	108,065	3.9%	58,605	7.0%	307,454
Oklahoma	13.0%	57,093	13.6%	57,095	6.6%	30,469	10.9%	144,657
Oregon	5.7%	27,344	10.8%	56,081	7.1%	36,743	7.9%	120,169
Pennsylvania	6.0%	94,402	6.4%	104,889	4.3%	79,780	5.5%	279,071
Rhode Island	N/A	N/A	5.7%	8,326	N/A	N/A	5.0%	20,808
South Carolina	11.0%	77,992	9.1%	66,346	11.2%	71,176	10.4%	215,514
South Dakota	11.7%	13,376	4.6%	4,591	0.0%	0	5.8%	17,967
Tennessee	12.0%	111,579	6.4%	47,916	8.1%	63,497	9.0%	222,992
Texas	15.3%	549,116	12.8%	337,661	4.4%	125,162	11.1%	1,011,940
Utah	9.0%	25,842	10.4%	28,260	5.4%	14,250	8.3%	68,351
Vermont	15.6%	11,732	4.7%	4,480	3.5%	3,453	7.3%	19,666
Virginia	5.2%	54,113	4.8%	52,480	7.0%	63,461	5.6%	170,055
Washington	6.4%	58,087	5.5%	48,954	3.2%	27,007	5.0%	134,047
West Virginia	12.7%	25,584	10.0%	27,107	10.7%	28,141	11.0%	80,832
Wisconsin	7.0%	52,680	6.7%	51,050	2.8%	18,718	5.6%	122,448
Wyoming	7.4%	4,714	7.9%	7,434	3.2%	1,914	6.4%	14,062
United States	**9.4%**	**3,847,104**	**8.2%**	**3,208,177**	**6.0%**	**2,317,874**	**7.9%**	**9,373,155**

Note: *N/A = data not reported due to small sample size (cell size < 100).*

Source: *AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS).*

1 The U.S. Department of Agriculture's food security statistics are based on the nationally representative Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FFS), which includes several questions about behaviors and experiences associated with difficulty meeting food needs. Food insecurity status is assigned based on responses to these survey questions.

2 James P. Ziliak and Craig Gundersen, "The Health Consequences of Senior Hunger in the United States: Evidence from the 1999-2016 NHANES," Feeding America, August 2021, https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/2021%20-%20Health%20Consequences%20of%20Senior%20Hunger%201999-2016.pdf.

3 Metropolitan areas have at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more inhabitants.

4 SNAP is a federal program that provides benefits to low-income households to buy food. More information is available at www.aarp.org/SNAP.

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